



The President of Senegal Thinks Local

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The president of Senegal, Macky Sall, canceled all 29 foreign fishing permits as one of his first acts when he took office in April 2012. The nation's communities and fisheries have bounced back over the last year with local fishermen seeing their catches increase.

Factory ships weighing 11,000 tons from Morocco, Russia, Lithuania, Ukraine, China and Belize had been using satellite technology to reel in hundreds of tons of fish a day before the haul disappeared from Senegal and landed on dinner plates in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in Europe.

Local fishermen had to compete on 30-foot boats that brought in a few tons of nearby fish a year. They were traveling farther and farther out to sea as fisheries dwindled—a problem exacerbated by [illegal foreign fishing vessels](http://www.illegal-fishing.info/sub_approach.php?subApproach_id=86) (http://www.illegal-fishing.info/sub_approach.php?subApproach_id=86). The country saw \$100 million less in revenue a year because of outside fishing boats, according to Greenpeace, while the entire West African region continues to lose \$1 billion a year.

Sall's pledge to protect local economies from the international free market is an important and rare act of resistance to the doctrine of globalization. Since the crumbling of the Soviet Union, especially, developing countries have opened up their markets to rich Western nations that promise that unfettered capitalism will strengthen local economies. Often, the opposite happens.

GDP may go up, but it's not because economies are healthier. Figures might climb because Western countries put a price tag on an economy that has traditionally been informal. Where fish, for example, had been caught and eaten locally, without figuring into the GDP, they are now amassed by foreign trawlers who pay for licenses, making Senegal a richer nation from a Western perspective, but a poorer one in real terms.

Senegal, which started to free up its fishing market 10 years ago, saw many of its fishing communities revolt in 2012 as large foreign trawlers began decimating the stock.

"Big fishing companies create an inequitable competition with local communities," said [Ahmed Diame](http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/03/03/too-few-fish-in-the-sea/in-west-africa-fishermen-get-political) (<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/03/03/too-few-fish-in-the-sea/in-west-africa-fishermen-get-political>) from the Greenpeace office in Senegal's capital city of Dakar. "Local communities don't benefit from the presence of these vessels which fish, process and send out all their catches [themselves]."

Sall, who promised to rescind foreign licenses in his platform when he ran for office, followed through on April 30, 2012, as fishermen were ready to act on their own.

"You can be sure that I was approached by many [international] fishing companies," Sall said at an event for the marine conservation group Blue Frontier Campaign in Washington, D.C., last week, "but I was also aware of the cries of fishermen who were running out of fish.

"Forget about the \$12 million in profits," he said about corporate guarantees. "Focus on what the people need."

Sall said that poor countries should band together to fight globalization. He wants to see neighboring nations in Africa, especially those on the coast that have suffered the same losses as Senegal, protect their natural resources and worry more about their local economies than shallow GDP levels.

Some are following the direction Senegal has taken. Palau has refused to allow Taiwan to send fishing vessels into its waters. And groups such as Greenpeace are fighting on behalf of islands in the western Pacific Ocean to bar foreign trawlers from overfishing yellowfin tuna.

Sooner or later, Sall said, countries will have "to take a break from draining natural resources. ... Fishermen are not the experts in protecting the oceans." The responsibility lies with those who can understand the process, he said, those often bought off by corporations.

"The most well-known dish in Senegal is rice with fish," Sall noted. "I can't take that away from the Senegalese."

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AP/Tanya Bindra

Then-candidate Macky Sall smiles at journalists after casting his vote at a polling station in Fatick, Senegal.

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